The Story of Rosina

and other Verses

by

Austin Dobson

Illustrated by

Hugh Thomson

Joseph Bonus.

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THE STORY OF ROSINA

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BALLAD OF BEAU BROCADE, and other Poems of the XVIIIth Century. With fifty Illustrations by HUGH THOMSON. Eleventh Thousand.

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"Dorothy

The Story of Rosina

and

other Verses

by

Austin Dobson

Illustrated

by

Hugh Thomson

London
Kegan Paul,
French,
Trübner
& Co.

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1150

Ballantyne
Press

DEDICATION

TO * * *

What would our modern maids to-day?
I watch, and can't conjecture:
A dubious Tale?—an Ibsen Play?—
A pessimistic Lecture?—

I know not. But this, Child, I know:
You like things sweet and seemly;
Old-fashioned flowers, old shapes in Bow,
"Auld Robin Gray" (extremely);

You—with my "Dorothy"—delight
In fragrant cedar-presses;
In window-corners warm and bright,
In lawn, and lilac dresses;

You still can read, at any rate,
Charles Lamb and "Evelina":—
To You, My Dear, I dedicate
*This "*STORY OF ROSINA.*"*

*Were it not for the recollection of certain inconvenient but salutary epigrams, and more particularly Pope's couplet about the pictures that "*for the page atone,*" I might perhaps be disposed to cheat myself with the belief that the welcome which greeted "*The Ballad of Beau Brocade*" was not, in the main, attributable to the designs of an Artist whose hand is never so happy as when it works in the half-light of a bygone time. But if I cannot lay any such flattering unction to my* amour-propre, *I may at least reflect with satisfaction that "*The Story of Rosina*" is equally fortunate in its illustrator. In spite of many*

obstacles, Mr. Hugh Thomson *has again afforded me the invaluable aid of his fertile fancy; and I am therefore fully warranted in hoping that this further volume of reprinted verses may achieve a success equal, if not superior, to that of its predecessor.*

Austin Dobson.

September 1895.

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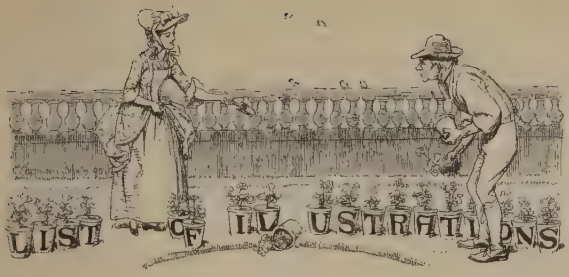

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THE STORY OF ROSINA

"The Scene"

AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF
FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

"On ne badine pas avec l'amour"

THE scene, a wood. A shepherd tip-toe creeping,
Carries a basket, whence a billet peeps,
To lay beside a silk-clad Oread sleeping
Under an urn; yet not so sound she sleeps
But that she plainly sees his graceful act;
"He thinks she thinks he thinks she sleeps," in fact.

One hardly needs the "*Peint par François Boucher.*"
All the sham life comes back again,—one sees
Alcôves, *Ruelles*, the *Lever*, and the *Coucher*,
Patches and Ruffles, *Roués* and *Marquises;*
The little great, the infinite small thing
That ruled the hour when Louis Quinze was king.

For these were yet the days of halcyon weather,—
A "Martin's summer," when the nation swam,
Aimless and easy as a wayward feather,
Down the full tide of jest and epigram;—
A careless time, when France's bluest blood
Beat to the tune of "After us the flood."

Plain Roland still was placidly "inspecting,"
Not now Camille had stirred the Café Foy;
Marat was young, and Guillotin dissecting,
Corday unborn, and Lamballe in Savoie;

"Watching the suspended Cherries"

No *faubourg* yet had heard the Tocsin ring:—
This was the summer—when Grasshoppers sing.

And far afield were sun-baked savage creatures,
Female and male, that tilled the earth, and wrung
Want from the soil;—lean things with livid features,
Shape of bent man, and voice that never sung:
These were the Ants, for yet to Jacques Bonhomme
Tumbrils were not, nor any sound of drum.

But Boucher was a Grasshopper, and painted,—
Rose-water Raphael,—*en couleur de rose*,
The crowned Caprice, whose sceptre, nowise sainted,
Swayed the light realm of ballets and bon-mots;—
Ruled the dim boudoir's *demi-jour*, or drove
Pink-ribboned flocks through some pink-flowered
grove.

A laughing Dame, who sailed a laughing cargo
Of flippant loves along the *Fleuve du Tendre;*
Whose greatest grace was *jupes à la Camargo,*
Whose gentlest merit *gentiment se rendre;*—
Queen of the rouge-cheeked Hours, whose footsteps fell
To Rameau's notes, in dances by Gardel;— . .

Her Boucher served, till Nature's self betraying,
As Wordsworth sings, the heart that loved her not,
Made of his work a land of languid Maying,
Filled with false gods and muses misbegot;—
A Versailles Eden of cosmetic youth,
Wherein most things went naked, save the Truth.

Once, only once,—perhaps the last night's revels
Palled in the after-taste,—our Boucher sighed
For that first beauty, falsely named the Devil's,
Young-lipped, unlessoned, joyous, and clear-eyed;

Flung down his palette like a weary man,
And sauntered slowly through the Rue Sainte-Anne.

Wherefore, we know not; but, at times, far nearer
Things common come, and lineaments half-seen
Grow in a moment magically clearer;—
Perhaps, as he walked, the grass he called "too green"
Rose and rebuked him, or the earth "ill-lighted"
Silently smote him with the charms he slighted.

But, as he walked, he tired of god and goddess,
Nymphs that deny, and shepherds that appeal;
Stale seemed the trick of kerchief and of bodice,
Folds that confess, and flutters that reveal;
Then as he grew more sad and disenchanted,
Forthwith he spied the very thing he wanted.

So, in the Louvre, the passer-by might spy some
Arch-looking head, with half-evasive air,
Start from behind the fruitage of Van Huysum,
Grape-bunch and melon, nectarine and pear :—
Here 'twas no Venus of Batavian city,
But a French girl, young, *piquante*, bright, and pretty.

Graceful she was, as some slim marsh-flower shaken
Among the sallows, in the breezy Spring ;
Blithe as the first blithe song of birds that waken,
Fresh as a fresh young pear-tree blossoming ;
Black was her hair as any blackbird's feather ;
Just for her mouth, two rose-buds grew together.

Sloes were her eyes ; but her soft cheeks were peaches,
Hued like an Autumn pippin, where the red
Seems to have burned right through the skin, and reaches
E'en to the core ; and if you spoke, it spread

"Besought her leave"

Up till the blush had vanquished all the brown,
And, like two birds, the sudden lids dropped down.

As Boucher smiled, the bright black eyes ceased
dancing,
As Boucher spoke, the dainty red eclipse
Filled all the face from cheek to brow, enhancing
Half a shy smile that dawned around the lips.
Then a shrill mother rose upon the view;
"*Cerises, M'sieu? Rosine, dépêchez-vous!*"

Deep in the fruit her hands Rosina buries,
Soon in the scale the ruby bunches lay.
The painter, watching the suspended cherries,
Never had seen such little fingers play;—
As for the arm, no Hebè's could be rounder;
Low in his heart a whisper said "I've found her."

"Woo first the mother, if you'd win the daughter!"
Boucher was charmed, and turned to *Madame Mère*,
Almost with tears of suppliance besought her
Leave to immortalize a face so fair;
Praised and cajoled so craftily that straightway
Voici Rosina,—standing at his gateway.

Shy at the first, in time Rosina's laughter
Rang through the studio as the girlish face
Peeped from some painter's travesty, or after
Showed like an Omphale in lion's case;
Gay as a thrush, that from the morning dew
Pipes to the light its clear "*Réveillez-vous.*"

Just a mere child with sudden ebullitions,
Flashes of fun, and little bursts of song,
Petulant pains, and fleeting pale contritions,
Mute little moods of misery and wrong;

The unknown comer"

Only a child, of Nature's rarest making,
Wistful and sweet,—and with a heart for breaking!

Day after day the little loving creature
Came and returned; and still the Painter felt,
Day after day, the old theatric Nature
Fade from his sight, and like a shadow melt
Paniers and Powder, Pastoral and Scene,
Killed by the simple beauty of Rosine.

As for the girl, she turned to her new being,—
Came, as a bird that hears its fellow call;
Blessed, as the blind that blesses God for seeing;
Grew, as a flower on which the sun-rays fall;
Loved if you will; she never named it so:
Love comes unseen,—we only see it go.

There is a figure among Boucher's sketches,
  Slim,—a child-face, the eyes as black as beads.
Head set askance, and hand that shyly stretches
  Flowers to the passer, with a look that pleads.
This was no other than Rosina surely;—
None Boucher knew could else have looked so purely.

But forth her Story, for I will not tarry,
  Whether he loved the little "nut-brown maid";
If, of a truth, he counted this to carry
  Straight to the end, or just the whim obeyed.
Nothing we know, but only that before
More had been done, a finger tapped the door.

Opened Rosina to the unknown comer.
  'Twas a young girl—"*une pauvre fille*," she said,
"They had been growing poorer all the summer:
  Father was lame, and mother lately dead;

"On his knees"

Bread was so dear, and,—oh! but want was bitter,
Would Monsieur pay to have her for a sitter?

Men called her pretty." Boucher looked a minute:
Yes, she was pretty; and her face beside
Shamed her poor clothing by a something in it,—
Grace, and a presence hard to be denied;
This was no common offer it was certain;—
"*Allez*, Rosina! sit behind the curtain."

Meantime the Painter, with a mixed emotion,
Drew and re-drew his ill-disguised Marquise,
Passed in due time from praises to devotion;
Last when his sitter left him on his knees,
Rose in a maze of passion and surprise,—
Rose, and beheld Rosina's saddened eyes.

Thrice-happy France, whose facile sons inherit
Still in the old traditionary way,
Power to enjoy—with yet a rarer merit,
Power to forget! Our Boucher rose, I say,
With hand still prest to heart, with pulses throbbing,
And blankly stared at poor Rosina sobbing.

"This was no model, *M'sieu*, but a lady."
Boucher was silent, for he knew it true.
"*Est-ce que vous l'aimez?*" Never answer made he!
Ah, for the old love fighting with the new!
"*Est-ce que vous l'aimez?*" sobbed Rosina's sorrow.
"*Bon!*" murmured Boucher; "she will come to-morrow."

How like a hunter thou, O Time, dost harry
Us, thine oppressed, and pleasured with the chase,
Sparest to strike thy sorely-running quarry,
Following not less with unrelenting face.

By the door she lingers

Time, if Love hunt, and Sorrow hunt, with thee,
Woe to the Fawn! There is no way to flee.

Woe to Rosina! By To-morrow stricken,
Swift from her life the sun of gold declined.
Nothing remained but those gray shades that thicken,
Cloud and the cold,—the loneliness—the wind.
Only a little by the door she lingers,—
Waits, with wrung lip and interwoven fingers.

No, not a sign. Already with the Painter
Grace and the nymphs began recovered reign;
Truth was no more, and nature, waxing fainter,
Paled to the old sick Artifice again.
Seeing Rosina going out to die,
How should he know that Fame had passed
him by?

Going to die! For who shall waste in sadness,
Shorn of the sun, the very warmth and light,
Miss the green welcome of the sweet earth's gladness,
Lose the round life that only Love makes bright:
There is no succour if these things are taken.
None but Death loves the lips by Love forsaken.

So, in a little, when those Two had parted,—
Tired of himself, and weary as before,
Boucher remembering, sick and sorry-hearted,
Stayed for a moment by Rosina's door.
"Ah, the poor child!" the neighbours cry of her,
"*Morte, M'sieu, morte! On dit,—des peines du cœur!*"

Just for a second, say, the tidings shocked him,
Say, in his eye a sudden tear-drop shone,—
Just for a second a dull feeling mocked him
With a vague sense of something priceless gone;

"Ah, the poor child!"

Then,—for at best 'twas but the empty type,
The husk of man with which the days were ripe,—

Then, he forgot her. But, for you that slew her,
You, her own sister, that with airy ease,
Just for a moment's fancy could undo her,
Pass on your way. A little while, Marquise,
Be the sky silent, be the sea serene;
A pleasant passage—*à Sainte Guillotine!*

As for Rosina,—for the quiet sleeper,
Whether stone hides her, or the happy grass,
If the sun quickens, if the dews beweep her,
Laid in the Madeleine or Montparnasse,
Nothing we know,—but that her heart is cold,
Poor beating heart! And so the story's told.

UNE MARQUISE

"Thick as bees"

A RHYMED MONOLOGUE IN THE LOUVRE

"*Belle Marquise, vos beaux yeux me font mourir d'amour.*"—MOLIÈRE

I

AS you sit there at your ease,
O Marquise!
And the men flock round your knees
Thick as bees,

Mute at every word you utter,
Servants to your least frill flutter,
"*Belle Marquise!*"—
As you sit there growing prouder,
And your ringed hands glance and go,
And your fan's *frou-frou* sounds louder,
And your "*beaux yeux*" flash and glow;—
Ah, you used them on the Painter,
As you know,
For the Sieur Larose spoke fainter,
Bowing low,
Thanked Madame and Heaven for Mercy
That each sitter was not Circe,
Or at least he told you so;—
Growing proud, I say, and prouder
To the crowd that come and go,
Dainty Deity of Powder,
Fickle Queen of Fop and Beau,

"Your last poet on his knees"

As you sit where lustres strike you,

Sure to please,

Do we love you most or like you,

"*Belle Marquise!*"

II

You are fair; O yes, we know it

Well, Marquise:

For he swore it, your last poet,

On his knees;

And he called all heaven to witness

Of his ballad and its fitness,

"*Belle Marquise!*"—

You were everything in *ère*

(With exception of *sévère*),—

You were *cruelle* and *rebelle*,

With the rest of rhymes as well;

You were "*Reine*," and "*Mère d'Amour*";
You were "*Vénus à Cythère*";
"*Sappho mise en Pompadour*,"
And "*Minerve en Parabère*";
You had every grace of heaven
In your most angelic face,
With the nameless finer leaven
Lent of blood and courtly race;
And he added, too, in duty,
Ninon's wit and Boufflers' beauty;
And La Vallière's *yeux veloutés*
Followed these;
And you liked it, when he said it
(On his knees),
And you kept it, and you read it,
"*Belle Marquise!*"

III

Yet with us your toilet graces
Fail to please,
And the last of your last faces,
And your *mise ;*
For we hold you just as real,
"*Belle Marquise !*
As your *Bergers* and *Bergères*,
Iles d'Amour and *Batelières ;*
As your *parcs*, and your Versailles,
Gardens, grottoes, and *rocailles ;*
As your Naiads and your trees ;—
Just as near the old ideal
Calm and ease,
As the Venus there, by Coustou,
That a fan would make quite flighty,

Is to her the gods were used to,—

Is to grand Greek Aphroditè,

Sprung from seas.

You are just a porcelain trifle,

"*Belle Marquise!*"

Just a thing of puffs and patches,

Made for madrigals and catches,

Not for heart-wounds, but for scratches,

O Marquise!

Just a pinky porcelain trifle,

"*Belle Marquise!*"

Wrought in rarest *rose-Dubarry*,

Quick at verbal point and parry,

Clever, doubtless;—but to marry,

No, Marquise!

IV

For your Cupid, you have clipped him,
Rouged and patched him, nipped and snipped him,
And with *chapeau-bras* equipped him,
"*Belle Marquise!*"
Just to arm you through your wife-time,
And the languors of your life-time,
"*Belle Marquise!*"
Say, to trim your toilet tapers,
Or,—to twist your hair in papers,
Or,—to wean you from the vapours;—
As for these,
You are worth the love they give you,
Till a fairer face outlive you,
Or a younger grace shall please;

Till the coming of the crows' feet,
And the backward turn of beaux' feet,
"*Belle Marquise!*"—
Till your frothed-out life's commotion
Settles down to Ennui's ocean,
Or a dainty sham devotion,
"*Belle Marquise!*"

v

No: we neither like nor love you,
"*Belle Marquise!*"
Lesser lights we place above you,—
Milder merits better please.
We have passed from *Philosophe*-dom
Into plainer modern days,—
Grown contented in our oafdom,
Giving grace not all the praise;

And, *en partant, Arsinoé,*—

Without malice whatsoever,—

We shall counsel to our Chloë

To be rather good than clever;

For we find it hard to smother

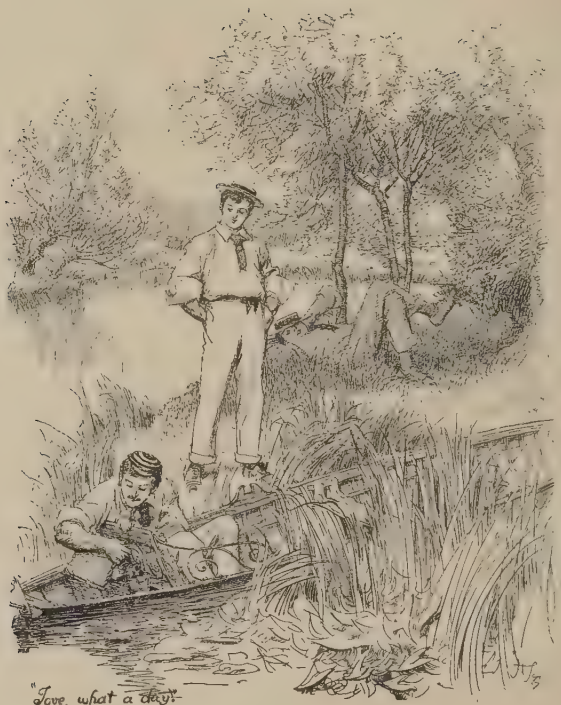
Just one little thought, Marquise!

Wittier perhaps than any other,—

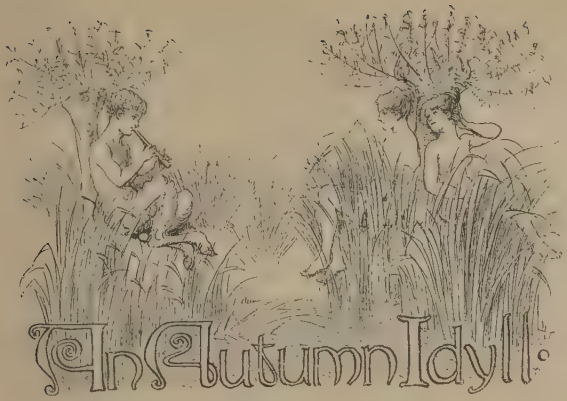
You were neither Wife nor Mother,

"Belle Marquise!"

AN AUTUMN IDYLL



"Love, what a day!"



"Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song"

SPENSER

LAWRENCE. FRANK. JACK.

LAWRENCE.

HERE, where the beech-nuts drop among the grasses,

Push the boat in, and throw the rope ashore.

Jack, hand me out the claret and the glasses;

Here let us sit. We landed here before.

FRANK.

Jack's undecided. Say, *formose puer*,
Bent in a dream above the "water wan,"
Shall we row higher, for the reeds are fewer,
There by the pollards, where you see the swan?

JACK.

Hist! That's a pike. Look—nose against the river,
Gaunt as a wolf,—the sly old privateer!
Enter a gudgeon. Snap,—a gulp, a shiver;—
Exit the gudgeon. Let us anchor here.

FRANK (*in the grass*).

Jove, what a day! Black Care upon the crupper
Nods at his post, and slumbers in the sun;
Half of Theocritus, with a touch of Tupper,
Churns in my head. The frenzy has begun!

LAWRENCE.

Sing to us then. Damœtas in a choker,
Much out of tune, will edify the rooks.

FRANK.

Sing you again. So musical a croaker
Surely will draw the fish upon the hooks.

JACK.

Sing while you may. The beard of manhood still is
Faint on your cheeks, but I, alas! am old.
Doubtless you yet believe in Amaryllis;—
Sing me of Her, whose name may not be told.

FRANK.

Listen, O Thames! His budding beard is riper,
Say—by a week. Well, Lawrence, shall we sing?

LAWRENCE.

Yes, if you will. But ere I play the piper,
Let him declare the prize he has to bring.

JACK.

Hear then, my Shepherds. Lo, to him accounted
First in the song, a Pipe I will impart;—
This, my Belovèd, marvellously mounted,
Amber and foam,—a miracle of art.

LAWRENCE.

Lordly the gift. O Muse of many numbers,
Grant me a soft alliterative song!

FRANK.

Me too, O Muse! And when the Umpire slumbers,
Sting him with gnats a summer evening long.

LAWRENCE.

Not in a cot, begarlanded of spiders,
Not where the brook traditionally "purls,"—
No, in the Row, supreme among the riders,
Seek I the gem,—the paragon of girls.

FRANK.

Not in the waste of column and of coping,
Not in the sham and stucco of a square,—
No, on a June-lawn, to the water sloping,
Stands she I honour, beautifully fair.

LAWRENCE.

Dark-haired is mine, with splendid tresses plaited
Back from the brows, imperially curled;
Calm as a grand, far-looking Caryatid,
Holding the roof that covers in a world.

FRANK.

Dark-haired is mine, with breezy ripples swinging
Loose as a vine-branch blowing in the morn;
Eyes like the morning, mouth for ever singing,
Blithe as a bird new risen from the corn.

LAWRENCE.

Best is the song with the music interwoven:
Mine's a musician,—musical at heart,—
Throbs to the gathered grieving of Beethoven,
Sways to the light coquetting of Mozart.

FRANK.

Best? You should hear mine trilling out a ballad,
Queen at a pic-nic, leader of the glees,
Not too divine to toss you up a salad,
Great in Sir Roger danced among the trees.

At her feet

LAWRENCE.

Ah, when the thick night flares with dropping torches,
Ah, when the crush-room empties of the swarm,
Pleasant the hand that, in the gusty porches,
Light as a snow-flake, settles on your arm.

FRANK.

Better the twilight and the cheery chatting,—
Better the dim, forgotten garden-seat,
Where one may lie, and watch the fingers tatting,
Lounging with Bran or Bevis at her feet.

LAWRENCE.

All worship mine. Her purity doth hedge her
Round with so delicate divinity, that men,
Stained to the soul with money-bag and ledger,
Bend to the goddess, manifest again.

JACK.

"*Souvent femme varie,*" as a rule, is truer;
Flattered, I'm sure,—but both of you romance.
Happy to further suit of either wooer,
Merely observing—you haven't got a chance.

LAWRENCE.

Yes. But the Pipe—

FRANK.

The Pipe is what we care for,—

JACK.

Well, in this case, I scarcely need explain,
Judgment of mine were indiscreet, and therefore,—
Peace to you both. The Pipe I shall retain.

A GARDEN IDYLL

JACK.

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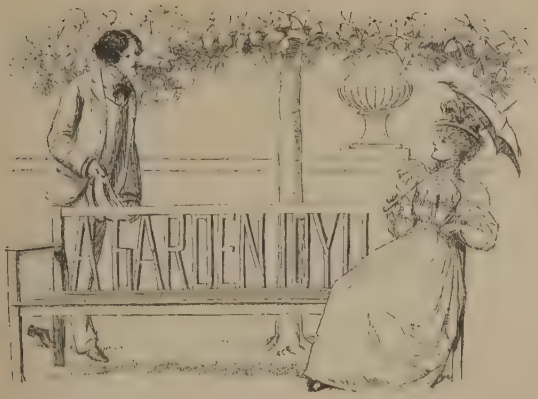
A GARDEN IDYLL

"Peered at the bee-hives curiously"



A Lady. A Poet.

The Lady.

SIR Poet, ere you crossed the lawn
(If it was wrong to watch you, pardon,)
Behind this weeping birch withdrawn,
I watched you saunter round the garden.
I saw you bend beside the phlox,
Pluck, as you passed, a sprig of myrtle,
Review my well-ranged hollyhocks,
Smile at the fountain's slender spurtle;

You paused beneath the cherry-tree,
Where my marauder thrush was singing,
Peered at the bee-hives curiously,
And narrowly escaped a stinging;
And then—you see I watched—you passed
Down the espalier walk that reaches
Out to the western wall, and last
Dropped on the seat before the peaches.

What was your thought? You waited long.
Sublime or graceful,—grave,—satiric?
A Morris Greek-and-Gothic song?
A tender Tennysonian lyric?
Tell me. That garden-seat shall be,
So long as speech renown disperses,
Illustrious as the spot where he—
The gifted Blank—composed his verses.

THE POET.

Madam,—whose uncensorious eye
  Grows gracious over certain pages,
Wherein the Jester's maxims lie,
  It may be, thicker than the Sage's—
I hear but to obey, and could
  Mere wish of mine the pleasure do you,
Some verse as whimsical as Hood,—
  As gay as Praed,—should answer to you.

But, though the common voice proclaims
  Our only serious vocation
Confined to giving nothings names,
  And dreams a "local habitation";
Believe me there are tuneless days,
  When neither marble, brass, nor vellum,
Would profit much by any lays
  That haunt the poet's cerebellum.

More empty things, I fear, than rhymes,
More idle things than songs, absorb it;
The "finely-frenzied" eye, at times,
Reposes mildly in its orbit;
And—painful truth!—at times, to him,
Whose jog-trot thought is nowise restive,
"A primrose by a river's brim"
Is absolutely unsuggestive.

The fickle Muse! As ladies will,
She sometimes wearies of her wooer;
A goddess, yet a woman still,
She flies the more that we pursue her;
In short, with worst as well as best,
Five months in six, your hapless poet
Is just as prosy as the rest,
But cannot comfortably show it.

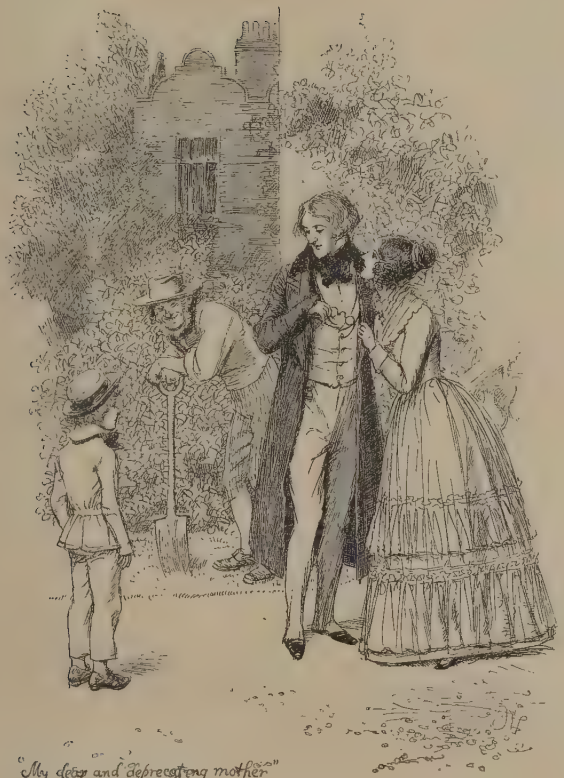
"Some dream of harp-prest bosoms"

You thought, no doubt, the garden-scent
  Brings back some brief-winged bright sensation
Of love that came and love that went,—
  Some fragrance of a lost flirtation,
Born when the cuckoo changes song,
  Dead ere the apple's red is on it,
That should have been an epic long,
  Yet scarcely served to fill a sonnet.

Or else you thought,—the murmuring noon,
  He turns it to a lyric sweeter,
With birds that gossip in the tune,
  And windy bough-swing in the metre;
Or else the zigzag fruit-tree arms
  Recall some dream of harp-prest bosoms,
Round singing mouths, and chanted charms,
  And mediæval orchard blossoms,—

Quite *à la mode*. Alas for prose!—
My vagrant fancies only rambled
Back to the red-walled Rectory close,
When first my graceless boyhood gamboled,
Climbed on the dial, teased the fish,
And chased the kitten round the beeches,
Till widening instincts made me wish
For certain slowly-ripening peaches.

Three peaches. Not the Graces three
Had more equality of beauty:
I would not look, yet went to see;
I wrestled with Desire and Duty;
I felt the pangs of those who feel
The Laws of Property beset them;
The conflict made my reason reel,
And, half-abstractedly, I ate them;—



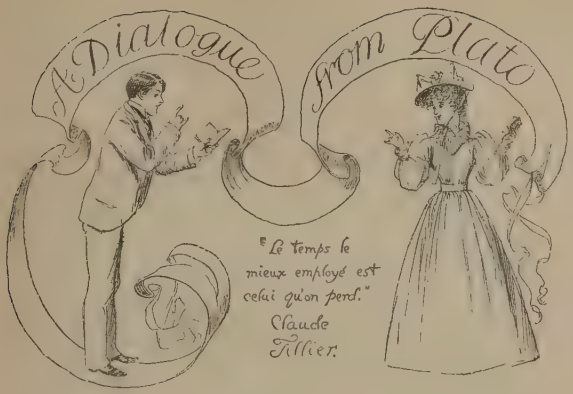
"My dear and Deprecating mother"

Or Two of them. Forthwith Despair—
More keen that one of these was rotten—
Moved me to seek some forest lair
Where I might hide and dwell forgotten,
Attired in skins, by berries stained,
Absolved from brushes and ablution;—
But, ere my sylvan haunt was gained,
Fate gave me up to execution.

I saw it all but now. The grin
That gnarled old Gardener Sandy's features;
My father, scholar-like and thin,
Unroused, the tenderest of creatures;
I saw—ah me—I saw again
My dear and deprecating mother;
And then, remembering the cane,
Regretted—that *I'd left the Other.*

A DIALOGUE FROM PLATO

"You 're reading Greek?



I'D "read" three hours. Both notes and text
Were fast a mist becoming;
In bounced a vagrant bee, perplexed,
And filled the room with humming,

Then out. The casement's leafage sways,
And, parted light, discloses
Miss Di., with hat and book,—a maze
Of muslin mixed with roses.

"You're reading Greek?" "I am—and you?"
"O, mine's a mere romancer!"
"So Plato is." "Then read him—do;
And I'll read mine in answer."

I read. "My Plato (Plato, too,—
That wisdom thus should harden!)
Declares 'blue eyes look doubly blue
Beneath a Dolly Varden.'"

She smiled. "My book in turn avers
(No author's name is stated)
That sometimes those Philosophers
Are sadly mis-translated."

"But hear,—the next's in stronger style:
The Cynic School asserted
That two red lips which part and smile
May not be controverted!"

"The Sequel's scarce essential"

She smiled once more—"My book, I find,
Observes some modern doctors
Would make the Cynics out a kind
Of album-verse concoctors."

Then I—"Why not? 'Ephesian law,
No less than time's tradition,
Enjoined fair speech on all who saw
DIANA's apparition.'"

She blushed—this time. "If Plato's page
No wiser precept teaches,
Then I'd renounce that doubtful sage,
And walk to Burnham-beeches."

"Agreed," I said. "For Socrates
(I find he too is talking)
Thinks Learning can't remain at ease
While Beauty goes a-walking."

She read no more. I leapt the sill:
The sequel's scarce essential—
Nay, more than this, I hold it still
Profoundly confidential.

DOROTHY

Preferred "Clarissa to a gossip's word"

SHE then must once have looked, as I
Look now, across the level rye,—
Past Church and Manor-house, and seen,
As now I see, the village green,
The bridge, and Walton's river—she
Whose old-world name was "Dorothy."

The swallows must have twittered, too,
Above her head ; the roses blew
Below, no doubt,—and, sure, the South
Crept up the wall and kissed her mouth,—
That wistful mouth, which comes to me
Linked with her name of Dorothy.

What was she like? I picture her
Unmeet for uncouth worshipper ;—
Soft,—pensive,—far too subtly graced
To suit the blunt bucolic taste,
Whose crude perception could but see
"Ma'am Fine-airs" in "Miss Dorothy."

How not? She loved, may be, perfume,
Soft textures, lace, a half-lit room ;—
Perchance too candidly preferred
"Clarissa" to a gossip's word ;—

"Twice-told Tales"

And, for the rest, would seem to be
Or proud, or dull—this Dorothy.

Poor child!—with heart the down-lined nest
Of warmest instincts unconfest,
Soft, callow things that vaguely felt
The breeze caress, the sunlight melt,
But yet, by some obscure decree
Unwinged from birth;—poor Dorothy!

Not less I dream her mute desire
To acred churl and booby squire,
Now pale, with timorous eyes that filled
At "twice-told tales" of foxes killed;—
Now trembling when slow tongues grew
free
'Twixt sport, and Port—and Dorothy!

'Twas then she'd seek this nook, and find
Its evening landscape balmy-kind;
And here, where still her gentle name
Lives on the old green glass, would frame
Fond dreams of unfound harmony
'Twixt heart and heart. Poor Dorothy!

L'ENVOI.

These last I spoke. Then Florence said,
Below me,—"Dreams? Delusions, Fred!"
Next, with a pause,—she bent the while
Over a rose, with roguish smile—
"But how disgusted, sir, you'll be
To hear *I* scrawled that 'Dorothy.'"

POT POURRI

"The vanished days"

"Si jeunesse savait?—"

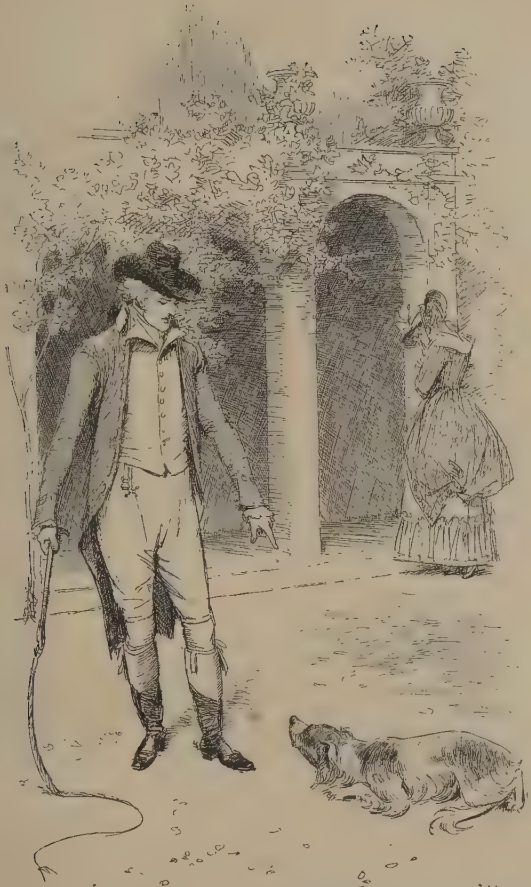
I PLUNGE my hand among the leaves :
(An alien touch but dust perceives,
Nought else supposes ;)
For me those fragrant ruins raise
Clear memory of the vanished days
When they were roses.

"If youth but knew!" Ah, "if", in truth—
I can recall with what gay youth,
To what light chorus,

Unsobered yet by time or change,
We roamed the many-gabled Grange,
All life before us;

Braved the old clock-tower's dust and damp
To catch the dim Arthurian camp
In misty distance;
Peered at the still-room's sacred stores,
Or rapped at walls for sliding doors
Of feigned existence.

What need had we for thoughts or cares!
The hot sun parched the old parterres
And "flowerful closes";
We roused the rooks with rounds and glees,
Played hide-and-seek behind the trees,—
Then plucked these roses.



"When Dash was smitten

Louise was one—light, glib Louise,
So freshly freed from school decrees
You scarce could stop her;
And Bell, the Beauty, unsurprised
At fallen locks that scandalized
Our dear "Miss Proper:"—

Shy Ruth, all heart and tenderness,
Who wept—like Chaucer's Prioress,
When Dash was smitten;
Who blushed before the mildest men,
Yet waxed a very Corday when
You teased her kitten.

I loved them all. Bell first and best;
Louise the next—for days of jest
Or madcap masking;

And Ruth, I thought,—why, failing these,
When my High-Mightiness should please,
She'd come for asking.

. . . . . .

Louise was grave when last we met;
Bell's beauty, like a sun, has set;
And Ruth, Heaven bless her,
Ruth that I wooed,—and wooed in vain,
Has gone where neither grief nor pain
Can now distress her.

THE SUNDIAL

"Betwixt the paths"

THIS an old dial, dark with many a stain ;
In summer crowned with drifting orchard bloom,
Tricked in the autumn with the yellow rain,
And white in winter like a marble tomb ;

And round about its gray, time-eaten brow
Lean letters speak—a worn and shattered row :

I am a Shade : a Shadowe too arte thou :
I marke the Time : saye, Gossip, dost thou soe ?

Here would the ringdoves linger, head to head;
And here the snail a silver course would run,
Beating old Time; and here the peacock spread
His gold-green glory, shutting out the sun.

The tardy shade moved forward to the noon;
Betwixt the paths a dainty Beauty stept,
That swung a flower, and, smiling, hummed a tune,—
Before whose feet a barking spaniel leapt.

O'er her blue dress an endless blossom strayed;
About her tendril-curls the sunlight shone;
And round her train the tiger-lilies swayed,
Like courtiers bowing till the queen be gone.

She leaned upon the slab a little while,
Then drew a jewelled pencil from her zone,
Scribbled a something with a frolic smile,
Folded, inscribed, and niched it in the stone.

The shade slipped on, no swifter than the snail;
There came a second lady to the place,
Dove-eyed, dove-robed, and something wan and pale—
An inner beauty shining from her face.

She, as if listless with a lonely love,
Straying among the alleys with a book,—
Herrick or Herbert,—watched the circling dove,
And spied the tiny letter in the nook.

Then, like to one who confirmation found
Of some dread secret half-accounted true,—
Who knew what hands and hearts the letter bound,
And argued loving commerce 'twixt the two,

She bent her fair young forehead on the stone;
The dark shade gloomed an instant on her head;
And 'twixt her taper-fingers pearled and shone
The single tear that tear-worn eyes will shed.

The shade slipped onward to the falling gloom
There came a soldier gallant in her stead,
Swinging a beaver with a swaling plume,
A ribboned love-lock rippling from his head;

Blue-eyed, frank-faced, with clear and open brow,
Scar-seamed a little, as the women love;
So kindly fronted that you marvelled how
The frequent sword-hilt had so frayed his glove;

Who switched at Psyche plunging in the sun;
Uncrowned three lilies with a backward swinge;
And standing somewhat widely, like to one
More used to "Boot and Saddle" than to cringe

As courtiers do, but gentleman withal,
Took out the note; held it as one who feared
The fragile thing he held would slip and fall;
Read and re-read, pulling his tawny beard;

Read and re-read

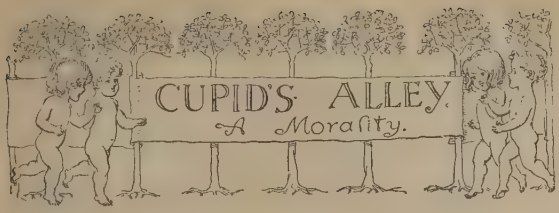
Kissed it, I think, and hid it in his breast ;
Laughed softly in a flattered happy way,
Arranged the broidered baldrick on his chest,
And sauntered past, singing a roundelay.

. . . . . .

The shade crept forward through the dying glow ;
There came no more nor dame nor cavalier ;
But for a little time the brass will show
A small gray spot—the record of a tear.

CUPID'S ALLEY

"High and low, and young and old"



O, Love's but a dance,
Where Time plays the fiddle!
See the couples advance,—
O, Love's but a dance!
A whisper, a glance,—
"Shall we twirl down the middle?"
O, Love's but a dance,
Where Time plays the fiddle!

IT runs (so saith my Chronicler)
Across a smoky City;—
A Babel filled with buzz and whirr,
Huge, gloomy, black and gritty;
Dark-louring looks the hill-side near,
Dark-yawning looks the valley,—
But here 'tis always fresh and clear,
For here—is "Cupid's Alley."

And, from an Arbour cool and green,
With aspect down the middle,
An ancient Fiddler, gray and lean,
Scrapes on an ancient fiddle;
Alert he seems, but aged enow
To punt the Stygian galley; –
With wisp of forelock on his brow,
He plays—in "Cupid's Alley."

All day he plays,—a single tune! –
But, by the oddest chances,
Gavotte, or Brawl, or Rigadoon,
It suits all kinds of dances;
My Lord may walk a *pas de Cour*
To Jenny's *pas de Chalet*;—
The folks who ne'er have danced before,
Can dance—in "Cupid's Alley."

And here, for ages yet untold,
Long, long before my ditty,
Came high and low, and young and old,
From out the crowded City;
And still to-day they come, they go,
And just as fancies tally,
They foot it quick, they foot it slow,
All day—in "Cupid's Alley."

Strange dance! 'Tis free to Rank and Rags;
Here no distinction flatters,
Here Riches shakes its money-bags,
And Poverty its tatters;
Church, Army, Navy, Physic, Law;—
Maid, Mistress, Master, Valet;
Long locks, gray hairs, bald heads, and a',—
They bob—in "Cupid's Alley."

Strange pairs! To laughing, fresh Fifteen
Here capers Prudence thrifty;
Here Prodigal leads down the green
A blushing Maid of fifty;
Some treat it as a serious thing,
And some but shilly-shally;
And some have danced without the ring
(Ah me!)—in "Cupid's Alley."

And sometimes one to one will dance,
And think of one behind her;
And one by one will stand, perchance,
Yet look all ways to find her;
Some seek a partner with a sigh,
Some win him with a sally;
And some, they know not how nor why,
Strange fate!—of "Cupid's Alley."

"From off his seat shall tumble"

And some will dance an age or so
Who came for half a minute;
And some, who like the game, will go
Before they well begin it;
And some will vow they're "danced to death,"
Who (somehow) always rally;
Strange cures are wrought (mine author saith),
Strange cures!—in "Cupid's Alley."

It may be one will dance to-day,
And dance no more to-morrow;
It may be one will steal away
And nurse a life-long sorrow;
What then? The rest advance, evade,
Unite, dispart, and dally,
Re-set, coquet, and gallopade,
Not less—in "Cupid's Alley."

For till that City's wheel-work vast
And shuddering beams shall crumble ;—
And till that Fiddler lean at last
From off his seat shall tumble ;—
Till then (the Civic records say),
This quaint, fantastic *ballet*
Of Go and Stay, of Yea and Nay,
Must last—in "Cupid's Alley."

LOVE IN WINTER

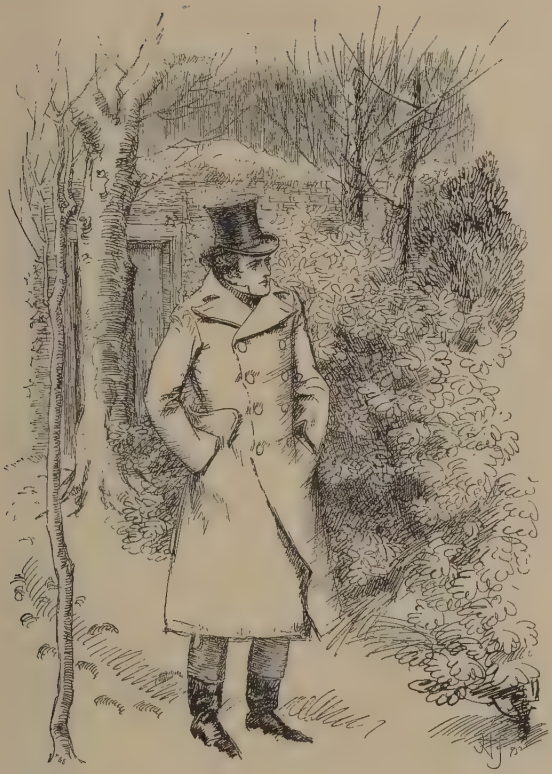
"Bright-eyed Bella."

BETWEEN the berried holly-bush
The Blackbird whistled to the Thrush:
"Which way did bright-eyed Bella go?
Look, Speckle-breast, across the snow,—
Are those her dainty tracks I see,
That wind beside the shrubbery?"

The Throstle pecked the berries still.
"No need for looking, Yellow-bill;
Young Frank was there an hour ago,
Half frozen, waiting in the snow;
His callow beard was white with rime,—
'Tchuck,—'tis a merry pairing-time!"

"What would you?" twittered in the Wren;
"These are the reckless ways of men.
I watched them bill and coo as though
They thought the sign of Spring was snow;
If men but timed their loves as we,
'Twould save this inconsistency."

"Nay, Gossip," chirped the Robin, "nay;
I like their unreflective way.
Besides, I heard enough to show
Their love is proof against the snow:—
'Why wait,' he said, 'why wait for May,
When love can warm a winter's day?'"



Waiting in the snow

THE CURÉ'S PROGRESS

"Monsieur the Cure"

The Curé's Progress

MONSIEUR the Curé down the street
Comes with his kind old face,—
With his coat worn bare, and his straggling hair,
And his green umbrella-case.

You may see him pass by the little "*Grande Place*,"
And the tiny "*Hôtel de Ville*";
He smiles as he goes, to the *fleuriste* Rose,
And the *pompier* Théophile.

He turns, as a rule, through the "*Marché*" cool,
Where the noisy fish-wives call;
And his compliment pays to the "*belle Thérèse*,"
As she knits in her dusky stall.

There's a letter to drop at the locksmith's shop,
And Toto, the locksmith's niece,
Has jubilant hopes, for the Curé gropes
In his tails for a *pain d'épice*.

There's a little dispute with a merchant of fruit,
Who is said to be heterodox,
That will ended be with a "*Ma foi, oui!*"
And a pinch from the Curé's box.

There is also a word that no one heard
To the furrier's daughter Lou.;
And a pale cheek fed with a flickering red,
And a "*Bon Dieu garde M'sieu!*"

But a grander way for the *Sous-Préfet*,
And a bow for Ma'am'selle Anne;
And a mock "off-hat" to the Notary's cat,
And a nod to the Sacristan:—

For ever through life the Curé goes
With a smile on his kind old face—
With his coat worn bare, and his straggling hair,
And his green umbrella-case.

AT THE CONVENT GATE

"Strive to lure anew"

WISTARIA blossoms trail
and fall
Above the length of barrier wall;
And softly, now and then,
The shy, staid-breasted doves
will flit
From roof to gateway-top, and sit
And watch the ways of men.

The gate's ajar. If one might peep!
Ah, what a haunt of rest and sleep
The shadowy garden seems!

And note how dimly to and fro
The grave, gray-hooded Sisters go,
Like figures seen in dreams.

Look, there is one that tells her beads;
And yonder one apart that reads
A tiny missal's page;
And see, beside the well, the two
That, kneeling, strive to lure anew
The magpie to its cage!

Not beautiful—not all! But each
With that mild grace, outlying speech,
Which comes of even mood;—
The Veil unseen that women wear
With heart-whole thought, and quiet care,
And hope of higher good.

"A placid life—a peaceful life!
What need to these the name of Wife?
What gentler task (I said)—
What worthier—e'en your arts among—
Than tend the sick, and teach the young,
And give the hungry bread?"

"No worthier task!" re-echoes She,
Who (closelier clinging) turns with me
To face the road again:
—And yet, in that warm heart of hers,
She means the doves', for she prefers
To "watch the ways of men."

THE MISOGYNIST

"His air was always woe-begone"

WHEN first he sought our haunts, he wore
His locks in Hamlet-style;
His brow with thought was "sicklied o'er,"—
We rarely saw him smile;
And, e'en when none were looking on,
His air was always woe-begone.

He kept, I think, his bosom bare
To imitate Jean Paul;

His solitary topics were
  Æsthetics, Fate, and Soul ;—
Although at times, but not for long,
He bowed his Intellect to song.

He served, he said, a Muse of Tears :
  I know his verses breathed
A fine funereal air of biers,
  And objects cypress-wreathed ;—
Indeed, his tried acquaintance fled
An ode he named "The Sheeted Dead."

In these light moods, I call to mind,
  He darkly would allude
To some dread sorrow undefined,—
  Some passion unsubdued ;

Then break into a ghastly laugh,
And talk of Keats his epitaph.

He railed at women's faith as Cant;
  We thought him grandest when
He named them Siren-shapes that "chant
  On blanching bones of Men;"—
Alas, not e'en the great go free
From that insidious minstrelsy!

His lot, he oft would gravely urge,
  Lay on a lone Rock where
Around Time-beaten bases surge
  The Billows of Despair.
We dreamed it true. We never knew
What gentler ears he told it to.

We, bound with him in common care,
One-minded, celibate,
Resolved to Thought and Diet spare
Our lives to dedicate;—
We, truly, in no common sense,
Deserved his closest confidence!

But soon, and yet, though soon, too late,
We, sorrowing, sighed to find
A gradual softness enervate
That all superior mind,
Until,—in full assembly met,
He dared to speak of Etiquette.

The verse that we severe had known,
Assumed a wanton air,—
A fond effeminate monotone
Of eyebrows, lips, and hair;

"I've met him last, Grown stout"

Not ἦθος stirred him now or νοῦς,
He read "The Angel in the House!"

Nay worse. He, once sublime to chaff,
Grew ludicrously sore
If we but named a photograph
We found him simpering o'er;
Or told how in his chambers lurked
A watch-guard intricately worked.

Then worse again. He tried to dress;
He trimmed his tragic mane;
Announced at length (to our distress)
He had not "lived in vain";—
Thenceforth his one prevailing mood
Became a base beatitude.

And O Jean Paul, and Fate, and Soul!

We met him last, grown stout,

His throat with wedlock's triple roll,

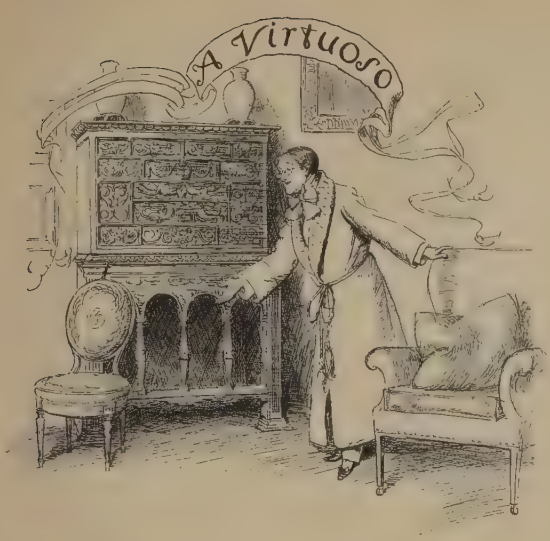
"All wool,"—enwound about;

His very hat had changed its brim;—

Our course was clear,—WE BANISHED HIM!

A VIRTUOSO

"A Virtuoso"



BE seated, pray. "A grave appeal"?
The sufferers by the war, of course;
Ah, what a sight for us who feel,—
This monstrous *mélodrame* of Force!
We, Sir, we connoisseurs, should know,
On whom its heaviest burden falls;
Collections shattered at a blow,
Museums turned to hospitals!

"And worse," you say; "the wide distress!"
Alas, 'tis true distress exists,
Though, let me add, our worthy Press
Have no mean skill as colourists;—
Speaking of colour, next your seat
There hangs a sketch from Vernet's hand;
Some Moscow fancy, incomplete,
Yet not indifferently planned;

Note specially the gray old Guard,
Who tears his tattered coat to wrap
A closer bandage round the scarred
And frozen comrade in his lap;—
But, as regards the present war,—
Now don't you think our pride of pence
Goes—may I say it?—somewhat far
For objects of benevolence?

You hesitate. For my part, I—
Though ranking Paris next to Rome,
Æsthetically—still reply
That "Charity begins at Home."
The words remind me. Did you catch
My so-named "Hunt"? The girl's a gem;
And look how those lean rascals snatch
The pile of scraps she brings to them!

"But your appeal's for home,"—you say,—
For home, and English poor! Indeed!
I thought Philanthropy to-day
Was blind to mere domestic need—
However sore—Yet though one grants
That home should have the foremost claims,
At least these Continental wants
Assume intelligible names;

While here with us—Ah ! who could hope
To verify the varied pleas,
Or from his private means to cope
With all our shrill necessities !
Impossible ! One might as well
Attempt comparison of creeds ;
Or fill that huge Malayan shell
With these half-dozen Indian beads.

Moreover, add that every one
So well exalts his pet distress,
'Tis—Give to all, or give to none,
If you'd avoid invidiousness.
Your case, I feel, is sad as A.'s,
The same applies to B.'s and C.'s ;
By my selection I should raise
An alphabet of rivalries ;

And life is short,—I see you look
At yonder dish, a priceless bit;
You'll find it etched in Jacquemart's book.
They say that Raphael painted it;—
And life is short, you understand;
So, if I only hold you out
An open though an empty hand,
Why, you'll forgive me, I've no doubt.

Nay, do not rise. You seem amused;
One can but be consistent, Sir!
'Twas on these grounds I just refused
Some gushing lady-almoner,—
Believe me, on these very grounds.
Good-bye, then. Ah, a rarity!
That cost me quite three hundred pounds,—
That Dürer figure,—"Charity."

NOTES

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Note 1, Page 1.

"*An Incident in the Life of François Boucher.*"

See *Boucher*, by Arsène Houssaye, *Galerie du XVIII^e Siècle* (*Cinquième Série*), and Charles Blanc, *Histoire des Peintres de tous les Écoles.*

Note 2, Page 1.

"*The scene, a wood.*"

The picture referred to is *Le Panier Mystérieux* by F. Boucher; engraved by R. Gaillard.

Note 3, Page 3.

"*And far afield were sun-baked savage creatures.*"

See *Les Caractères de* La Bruyère, *De l'homme.*

Note 4, Page 4.

"*Whose greatest grace was* jupes à la Camargo."

"*C'était le beau temps où Camargo trouvait ses jupes trop longues pour danser la gargouillade.*"—Arsène Houssaye.

NOTE 5, PAGE 5.

"*The grass he called 'too green.'*"

"*Il trouvait la nature trop verte et mal éclairée. Et son ami Lancret, le peintre des salons à la mode, lui répondait: 'Je suis de votre sentiment, la nature manque d'harmonie et de seduction.'*"—CHARLES BLANC.

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